United Nations E/CN.3/2003/25

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
30 November 2002

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Thirty-fourth session
4-7 March 2003
Item 6 (e) of the provisional agenda*
Activities not classified by field: coordination and integration of statistical programmes

Report of the inter-agency meeting on coordination of statistical activities

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the inter-agency meeting on coordination of statistical activities, held in New York from 17 to 19 September 2002. The report is transmitted in accordance with a request of the Commission at its thirty-third session.** In response to the request of the Commission to develop a new system for effective coordination given that the Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Statistical Activities had been disbanded as at 31 December 2001, the meeting participants decided to establish a Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, the functioning of which is set out in section L and annex IV below. The Commission may wish to take into account in its discussion under relevant agenda items the views expressed at the meeting. A list of the relevant agenda items and paragraphs of the present report follows:

* E/CN.3/2003/1.
** *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No. 4* (E/2002/24), para. 80 (c) and (d).

02-71627 (E) 131202

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Report of the inter-agency meeting on coordination of statistical activities

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I. Introduction

1. The inter-agency meeting on coordination of statistical activities was held in New York from 17 to 19 September 2002. The agenda is contained in annex I below, the list of participants in annex II and the list of documents in annex III.

II. Work of the inter-agency meeting on coordination of statistical activities

A. Opening of the meeting

2. In opening the meeting, Hermann Habermann, Director of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, explained that the Division had called the meeting because the Statistical Commission had stressed the need for international organizations to strengthen the coordination of their statistical activities and had requested the international organizations to develop a new system for effective coordination, given that the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Statistical Activities had been disbanded as at 31 December 2001. Furthermore, he noted that consultations among chief statisticians from the United Nations agencies and international organizations had shown that there was broad support for holding such a meeting. He informed representatives of international agencies that the report of the meeting would be presented to the Statistical Commission. Moreover, matters that required the attention of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) or policy guidance would be presented to the CEB High-level Committee on Programmes.

B. Election of the Chairman

3. Andrew Flatt of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) was elected as Chairman of the meeting.

C. Adoption of the agenda

4. The meeting participants adopted the agenda as set out in annex I.

D. Treatment of unfinished business of the former Subcommittee on Statistical Activities

5. It was decided at the meeting that the following two subjects were important and should be included in any future work plan that might be developed:

(a) Good citation practices in the outputs of international statistical offices (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO));

(b) The collection of disaggregated statistics by international organizations (including the uses of disaggregated statistics and the reporting burdens on countries) (United Nations Children's Fund).

E. Improving the quality of data used for indicators for the millennium development goals and targets

6. The oral report presented by the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the global reporting process for the millennium development goals was welcomed. Some agencies expressed concern regarding the selection and relevance of the indicators for some targets, especially in areas where data quality and availability were a serious problem; in particular, some agencies voiced concern that real change in the indicators would be confounded with changes resulting from revisions and improvements of the data. The problem would be particularly acute when examining annual differences. The meeting participants stressed the importance of building national capacity in order for countries to be able to produce the data necessary for national monitoring of the millennium development goals and to provide data to the international community for global monitoring.

7. Various participants in the meeting stated that the coordinated process led by the Statistics Division for the completion of the 2002 report on the millennium development goals had been successful and that its momentum should be maintained. The meeting supported the idea of having further inter-agency expert group meetings to ensure full participation and effective coordination among partner agencies.

8. The meeting took note of the Division's concern about the need for global reporting to be based on common regional groupings. Agencies designated to provide data on millennium development goal indicators reconfirmed their willingness to provide regional figures on the basis of the *Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistics Use*[1] to the extent possible. Agencies also agreed on the importance of comprehensive authoritative metadata in the presentation of indicators.

F. Issues relating to the assessment of the quality of statistical data in developing countries

9. The meeting took note of the report prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on the quality of statistical data in developing countries and shared experiences regarding the agency's efforts to improve reporting and the quality of those data. The following issues were highlighted:

(a) The need to develop close partnerships between international agencies and reporting national offices;

(b) The need to continue efforts to request and standardize metadata information;

(c) The need to improve coordination among national agencies involved in data reporting using mechanisms such as the General Data Dissemination System;

(d) The need to strengthen statistical capacity to produce better data for users at the national and international levels;

(e) The need to improve the transfer of technology to facilitate the flow of data at lower cost for both countries and international organizations.

The meeting took note of the use of incentives by international organizations for the collection of national data, however, it expressed concern at the demands by some countries for payment in exchange for data.

G. Quality assurance for statistics in international statistical services

10. The meeting welcomed the comprehensive analysis of this topic contained in the paper presented by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Several international agencies shared their experiences with quality assurance procedures, indicating that most discrepancies between national and international figures as well as between international sources are explainable, as they are often the result of different methods of compilation and estimation. However, the meeting agreed that more transparency about all methods applied is needed, and agencies committed themselves to reviewing, in particular, their web pages accordingly, making their own corporate quality assessment procedures more transparent. In this context, it was also noted that international organizations made frequent use of, and should in fact adhere to, the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. While the exchange on quality assurance was considered useful, it was recognized that there were limits to harmonizing such procedures across agencies, although the meeting welcomed joint activity in this area between the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) and encouraged other agencies to adopt consistent terminology and concepts to the extent possible.

H. Reducing duplication of data collection from countries

11. The meeting took note of the oral update given by the Deputy Director of the Statistics Division on steps undertaken to address the specific concerns raised by some Member States on duplication of data collection. All agencies involved, in particular lead agencies designated for a particular problem area, assured the Division of their full cooperation in the preparation of a comprehensive report on this issue for the thirty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission, to be held in 2003.

I. Coordination of data sets disseminated by different organizations covering the same subject matter

12. International agencies shared their experiences with joint data collection and common data sets. It was recognized that the examples mentioned in the note by the Statistics Division (SA/2002/8) were indeed examples of problem areas. Access to water and sanitation, exchange rates and child mortality data were cited as further examples where discrepancies existed. There was agreement that discrepancies in disseminated data series are best addressed and solved on a bilateral or trilateral basis with the directly concerned parties involved. Therefore, while not concurring with the specific suggestions for action made in paragraph 4 of the document, the meeting participants agreed that this was an important item that should remain on the agenda.

J. Coordination in the field of health statistics

13. The meeting welcomed the oral presentation made by the World Health Organization (WHO) on its ongoing initiatives, including consultations with countries to improve the validity and reliability of measures, the strengthening of data reporting, providing countries with new tools for measurement, the launching of the World Health Survey and the strengthening of vital registration systems.

14. The meeting participants expressed concern about the overlap of the World Health Survey programme with other ongoing survey initiatives at the international and national levels. It also raised questions about the sustainability of the programme at the country level. The meeting recognized the existing problem of coordination at the country level, where WHO works with its mandated counterpart, the Ministry of Health, with little involvement of the national statistical office, and welcomed the intention of WHO to improve in-country coordination.

15. The meeting also emphasized the need to improve the exchange of information on health statistics at the international level and welcomed the intention of WHO to intensify cooperation between agencies in this area. In particular, WHO agreed to designate a focal point on statistical matters and to attend the meeting of the EUROSTAT Task Force on Health and Health-related Interview Survey Data on 2 and 3 October 2002.

K. Information items

1. Major new initiatives planned by organizations

16. The meeting took note of new initiatives planned by IMF, FAO, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), as highlighted in the reports submitted by the respective bodies (SA/2002/10 and Add. 1-3). It also took note of oral presentations under this item, in particular:

(a) The description by OECD of the glossary of statistical terms currently being developed;

(b) The initiatives of UNESCO regarding statistics in the areas of science, culture, telecommunications and education, with a focus on improving data on early childhood and informal education;

(c) The development of a methodological framework for "decent work" by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

2. Issues related to the work of the task forces and intersecretariat working groups

17. The meeting took note of the reports submitted by the Task Force on Finance Statistics and the Task Force on International Trade Statistics, as well as by the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics. In particular, the meeting was informed that the Task Force on Finance Statistics was putting forward proposals for further methodological work. The meeting also took note of the oral reports presented by the Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services and the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts, in particular its intention to review the current procedures for updating the 1993 System of National Accounts.

3. Programme review of service statistics for the Statistical Commission, 2003

18. The meeting welcomed the progress report on the review of service statistics, which was prepared by OECD with input from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It shared the concern of the authors about the underrepresentation of developing countries in the Voorburg Group. It also considered such proposals as increasing sponsorship of developing country representatives in Voorburg Group meetings, holding such meetings in developing countries, inviting comments on draft recommendations and guidelines, to be located on the web site, and involving existing regional statistical committees. Those proposals were considered useful in strengthening the participation of developing countries in any city group.

4. Coordination of development indicators in the context of follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits

19. The meeting took note of the activities of the Statistics Division to follow up on the recommendations of the Statistical Commission on development indicators, in particular the formation of a standing advisory committee of national experts.

5. Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission

20. The meeting noted that, under other agenda items, the necessary collaboration on preparations for the thirty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission had been covered, namely, work on national accounts, international merchandise trade statistics, statistics of international trade in services, programme review of services, finance statistics, price statistics, coordination of development indicators and duplication of requests to countries for statistics. The meeting received an update on the work on the International Comparison Programme and on plans for an expert group meeting on the scope of social statistics and the expected reporting on those subjects to the Statistical Commission.

21. With respect to follow-up of the thirty-third session of the Statistical Commission, the meeting noted that any necessary collaboration had been carried out and had been covered under this and other agenda items of the meeting.

22. The meeting agreed to propose the inclusion in the multi-year programme of work of the Statistical Commission in 2004, an item entitled "Guidelines on the presentation of statistical data, especially on the Internet", and accepted an offer by OECD to do the preparations for the item, including: (a) preparing an oral statement on the issue at the 2003 session of the Statistical Commission; (b) obtaining input from countries in 2003; (c) preparing a draft document for submission to the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities in 2003; and (d) preparing a document for the Statistical Commission in 2004.

6. Consultative Seminar on Governance of National Statistical Systems

23. The meeting was briefed by IMF on the major conclusions of the Consultative Seminar on Governance of National Statistical Systems (Singapore, 28-30 May 2002), and it agreed to consider at a future meeting the issue of how international agencies can support countries in their efforts to establish effective statistical governance systems.

7. Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange initiative

24. The meeting took note of the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange initiative sponsored by six organizations (the Bank for International Settlements, the European Central Bank, EUROSTAT, IMF, OECD and the Statistics Division), to maintain and if necessary develop new electronic standards for their data exchange. It welcomed the invitation of IMF for interested agencies to participate in this dialogue. It agreed on the necessity to consider the item further at its future meetings.

L. How to organize the future coordination of statistical activities

25. The meeting noted that the High-level Committee on Programmes and the Statistical Commission had recognized the need for continuing coordination of statistical activities following the discontinuation of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities as from 31 December 2001. The meeting endorsed the conclusions of the consultative meeting that was held on 7 March 2002 among the international organizations that were present at the Statistical Commission. Those conclusions were as follows:

(a) There was a strong continuing need for coordination of international statistical work;

(b) The coordination work would involve meetings, but would be driven more by needs rather than proceeding according to a fixed schedule;

(c) A better job could be done on coordination, especially by focusing on emerging issues requiring coordination and follow-up of decisions to ensure that action is taken.

26. The meeting decided to establish a Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, the terms of reference of which are set out in annex IV, with comments and changes as follows:

(a) An additional objective of the Committee should be "to foster good practices in the structuring and programming of statistical activities in the international organizations";

(b) The participation of the directors of statistical services or equivalent in the Committee's meetings was considered particularly important for the effectiveness of the Committee's work;

(c) Work done on coordinating activities between meetings and follow-up of decisions are important elements of the work of the Committee, and this work should be reflected in the reports of the Committee to the Statistical Commission;

(d) The formal meetings provide an excellent opportunity for bilateral and multilateral discussions and networking, and time should be set aside in the meeting schedule for such activities;

(e) The Committee should strive for efficiency and effectiveness in its work and should adopt a strong proactive approach to its work;

(f) In principle, it is expected that there will be an annual meeting, but advantage will be taken of the annual session of the Statistical Commission to bring

the Committee together to consider any issues that need to be considered at that time and to reconsider the proposed agenda and need for the next scheduled Committee session;

(g) All documents for the meetings should be distributed well in advance of the meetings;

(h) The secretariat should contact the lead organizations well in advance of a meeting of the Committee to remind them of commitments made;

(i) The reports of the meetings of the Committee should specify the lead organizations that are responsible for action and follow-up.

27. The meeting requested the Statistics Division to prepare terms of reference in line with those comments and changes for the Committee to review.

28. The meeting agreed that the Committee should meet from 9 to 11 September 2003 and adopted a provisional agenda for the meeting (annex V). It also accepted an offer from ILO to host the meeting. In line with paragraph 26 (f) above, the meeting decided that the Committee would also meet in New York at 4 p.m. on Monday, 3 March (the day prior to the start of the Statistical Commission), and requested the secretariat to distribute the provisional agenda for the September meeting prior to that date so as to facilitate consideration of the agenda as well as the need for the session to be held as scheduled.

29. In line with annex IV, paragraph 6, the meeting elected Andrew Flatt of ESCAP as Chairman of the Committee for a period of two years.

Notes

[1] *Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistics Use* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.9); also available on the Internet at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49.htm.

Annex I

Agenda of the Inter-Agency Meeting on Coordination of Statistical Activities

(17-19 September 2002)

1. Opening of the Meeting.
2. Election of Chairman.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Treatment of any unfinished business of the Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Statistical Activities.
5. Improving the quality of data used for indicators for the millennium development goals and targets:
   (a) Improvement of the general process;
   (b) Harmonization of regional definitions;
   (c) Coordination of global surveys;
   (d) Conceptual and methodological issues.
6. Issues relating to the assessment of the quality of statistical data in developing countries.
7. Quality assurance for statistics in international statistical services.
8. Reducing duplication of data collection from countries.
9. Coordination of data sets disseminated by different organizations covering the same subject matter.
10. Coordination in the field of health statistics.
11. Information items:
    (a) Major new initiatives planned by organizations;
    (b) Issues related to the work of the task forces and inter-secretariat working groups;
    (c) Programme review of services statistics for the Statistical Commission for 2003;
    (d) Coordination of development indicators in the context of follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits;
    (e) Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission;
    (f) Singapore Consultative Seminar on Governance;
    (g) Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange Initiative.
12. How to organize the future coordination of statistical activities.
13. Other business.
14. Report of the Meeting.

Annex II

List of participants

United Nations entities and programmes

Department of Economic and Social Affairs	
Statistics Division	Hermann Habermann Willem F. M. De Vries Mary Chamie Cristina Hannig Robert Johnston Richard Roberts Stefan Schweinfest (Secretary)
Population Division	Larry Heligman
Division for Sustainable Development	Anne Kerr
Executive Office of the Secretary-General	Michael Doyle
Economic Commission for Europe	Lidia Bratanova
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	Andrew Flatt (Chairman)
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	Henri Laurencin
United Nations Development Programme	Haishan Fu Tom Griffin
United Nations Environment Programme	Ashbindu Singh
United Nations Human Settlements Programme	Guenter Karl
United Nations Children's Fund	Gareth Jones Tessa Wardlaw
United Nations Population Fund	Iqbal Alam

Specialized agencies and related organizations

International Labour Organization	Sylvester Young
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	Robert Mayo
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	Denise Lievesley Jose Pessoa
World Health Organization	Chris Murray
World Bank	Shaida Badiee
International Monetary Fund	Carol Carson
United Nations Industrial Development Organization	Tetsuo Yamada

Other international and non-governmental organizations

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development	Denis Ward
Statistical Office of the European Communities	James Whitworth
World Tourism Organization	Antonio Massieu
World Trade Organization	Roslyn Jackson
Inter-State Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States	Mikhail A. Korolev

Annex III

List of documents

Document No.	*Agenda item*	*Title or description*
SA/2002/1	3	Provisional agenda
SA/2002/2	3	Proposed schedule of discussions
SA/2002/3	4	Treatment of any "unfinished business" of the former Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Statistical Activities: note by the Secretariat
SA/2002/4	5	Improving the quality of data used for indicators for the millennium development goals and targets: note by the United Nations Statistics Division
SA/2002/5	6	Issues relating to the assessment of the quality of statistical data in developing countries: report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
SA/2002/6	7	Quality assurance for statistics in international statistical services: report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SA/2002/6/Add.1	7	Dimensions of statistical quality: note by United Nations Statistics Division
SA/2002/6/Add.2	7	United Nations Statistics Division data collections and quality procedures: note by the United Nations Statistics Division
-	8	Reducing duplication of data collection from countries: oral report
SA/2002/8	9	Coordination of data sets disseminated by different organizations covering the same subject matter: note by the United Nations Statistics Division
SA/2002/9	10	Coordination in the field of health statistics: note by the United Nations Statistics Division
SA/2002/10	11 (a)	Major new initiatives planned by organizations: note by the International Monetary Fund
SA/2002/10/Add.1	11 (a)	Major new initiatives planned by organizations: note by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
SA/2002/10/Add.2	11 (a)	Major new initiatives planned by organizations: note by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
SA/2002/10/Add.3	11 (a)	Major new initiatives planned by organizations: note by the UN-Habitat
SA/2002/10/Add.4	11 (a)	Major new initiatives planned by organizations: note by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
SA/2002/11	11 (b)	Inter-secretariat Working Group on Price Statistics: note by the International Labour

Document No.	*Agenda item*	*Title or description*
		Organization
SA/2002/11/Add.1	11 (b)	Task Force on Finance Services: note by the International Monetary Fund
SA/2002/11/Add.2	11 (b)	Task Force on International Trade Statistics: note by the World Trade Organization
SA/2002/12	11 (c)	Programme review of services statistics for the Statistical Commission, 2003: note by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SA/2002/13	11 (d)	Coordination of development indicators in the context of follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits: note by the United Nations Statistics Division
SA/2002/14	11 (e)	Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission: note by the United Nations Statistics Division
SA/2002/14/Add.1	11 (e)	Identifying issues that the Statistical Commission might discuss: note by the United Nations Statistics Division
SA/2002/15	12	How to organize the future coordination of statistical activities: note by the United Nations Statistics Division
A/57/270	5	Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration: report of the Secretary-General
-	5	Millennium indicators: summary of progress at the regional level based on the Secretary-General's report (A/57/270 (annex)): note by the United Nations Statistics Division
-	5	Estimating global slum dwellers
-	11 (e)	United Nations Expert Group Meeting on the Scope of Social Statistics: note by the United Nations Statistics Division
-	11 (f)	Summary of the proceedings of the Consultative Seminar on Governance of National Statistical Systems, Singapore, 28-30 May 2002
-	11 (g)	Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange Initiative
-		List of participants

Annex IV

Notes on a proposed inter-agency Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

1. The inter-agency Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities was established on (date) by the (establishing authority). Its objectives, which it takes over from the former Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Statistical Activities ((a), (b) and (c) below, modified by (d) below) are:

(a) To promote coordination, integration and complementarity among the statistical programmes of the international organizations, including the avoidance of duplication, and reduction in reporting burdens on Member States, and to promote coordination and consistency in statistical practices and development;

(b) To provide coordinated preparations for the treatment of statistical issues in intergovernmental meetings, including the Statistical Commission, and coordinated follow-up of decisions of the intergovernmental bodies, thus providing a responsive focus for addressing the needs of Member States;

(c) To achieve, through the coordination activity, an integrated system in the collection, processing and dissemination of international statistics by promoting the coordination of the international statistical system, including technical cooperation in statistics, and to facilitate the use in Member States of internationally agreed concepts, definitions, recommendations and classifications of different international organizations by coordinating the work on methodological development and promoting harmonization of the methodologies in various fields of statistics;

(d) Within the above framework, to focus on emerging issues requiring coordination and follow-up of decisions to ensure that action is taken.

2. The members of the Committee comprise all members and observers of the former ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities, namely, the United Nations Statistics Division, the regional commissions, the United Nations programmes and funds, the specialized agencies and related organizations, certain non-United Nations intergovernmental organizations (the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Statistical Office of the European Communities, the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the World Tourism Organization and the World Trade Organization), regional development banks and the International Statistical Institute. Other organizations can participate by invitation.

3. Representation in the Committee is normally at the level of director of an organization's statistical service or equivalent.

4. The Committee functions on a task-oriented basis using lead agency arrangements.

5. The Committee meets on an ad hoc basis as required by circumstances, usually for two and half days, but the decision to hold meetings and their length is driven by substance and needs, not by schedule.

6. The Committee elects a Chairman who serves for a two-year period and is eligible for re-election for a second two-year term. The Statistics Division is the permanent secretariat.

7. A decisions- and actions-only report is prepared for adoption at the end of each meeting; the report is made available to the United Nations Statistical Commission and, if necessary or desirable, the report is referred to the High-level Committee on Programmes of the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

6 August 2002

Annex V

Proposed agenda for the first meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities*

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Terms of reference of the Committee (Statistics Division).
4. Draft guidelines on the presentation of statistical data, especially on the Internet (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development).
5. Good citation practices in the outputs of international statistical offices (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).
6. Statistical data and metadata exchange Initiative (International Monetary Fund).
7. Improving the quality of data used for indicators for the millennium development goals and targets (Statistics Division).
8. Coordination of data sets disseminated by different organizations covering the same subject matter (Statistics Division).
9. Collection of disaggregated statistics by international organizations (United Nations Children's Fund).
10. Harmonization of base years for index numbers (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development).
11. Strengthening governance of statistical systems (International Monetary Fund).
12. Information items:
    (a) Major new initiatives planned by organizations (all);
    (b) Issues related to the work of the task forces and inter-secretariat working groups (conveners);
    (c) Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission (Statistics Division).
13. Other business.
14. Report of the meeting.

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* The agency responsible for preparing background documentation is indicated in brackets.